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ABSTRACT

Research that has focused on ancient Indian rhetoric, a sub-category of Eastern rhetoric, has largely eschewed focus on the narrative paradigm as a theoretical guide. These narratives often enshrine didactic elements, contradictions, and mythic traits that often confound and inspire Western audiences. These archaic religious/philosophical texts are increasingly making their way over into the non-Eastern world. This paper shall demonstrate one possible way that Eastern narrative, specifically ancient Indian didactic texts, can revise the current understanding of the narrative paradigm to allow for the introduction of new values and narratives to an audience. Using the examples of the "Avadhoota Gita" and the "Devi Gita," the paper delineates the niche for possibility in the narratives and their possible effects on a foreign audience. The paper labels these texts as "multivalent narratives"--by enshrining coexisting and conflicting value structures within their narratives, they expose audiences to new values and ideas while not alienating them through extreme novelty. The paper analyzes selected Indian narratives, with implications being drawn as to how they function to expose their potential audiences to novel value structures and ideas. J. Poulakos ends a 1984 article on the Sophists and Aristotle with a call to explore the relatively unexamined practices of the Sophistic rhetoric of possibility; the paper answers that call, albeit with a focus on the possible within Indian narratives. (Contains 61 references.) (NKA)

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Multivalent Narratives: Extending the Narrative Paradigm with Insights from Ancient Indian Rhetoric

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Multivalent Narratives: Extending the Narrative Paradigm with Insights from Indian Rhetoric

Introduction

The narrative paradigm, explicated predominantly by Fisher (1984; 1985; 1987), has spawned volumes of research in the field of rhetoric. While many productive studies have come forth out of this research project (Bass, 1985; Deming, 1985; Lewis, 1995; Rosteck, 1992), insightful criticisms and responses have also been volleyed in regard to potential weaknesses of this paradigm (Rowland, 1989; Turpin, 1998; Warnick, 1987). While many issues of narrative theory and practice have yet to be settled, an important limitation of the narrative paradigm is noticed by Kirkwood (1992), who voices the concern that the narrative paradigm is too stringently aligned with conservative issues in regard to a rhetoric of possibility; instead of allowing for audiences to accept new stories that challenge their values, this paradigm seems to allow audiences the choice of accepting narratives that resonate ("ring true") with their existent values and beliefs.

An area that could potentially expand the narrative to include possibility and novelty, eastern narratives, has been granted little research space in the narrative paradigm. Research that has focused on ancient Indian rhetoric, a sub-category of eastern rhetoric, has largely eschewed focus on the narrative paradigm as a theoretical guide (Gangal & Hosterman, 1982; Kirkwood, 1987; 1989; 1990). These narratives often enshrine didactic elements, contradictions, and mythic traits that often confound and inspire western audiences (Babbili, 1997; Matilal, 1992). These archaic religious/philosophical texts are increasing making their way over into the non-eastern world; for instance, Feuerstein (1983) points out that the *Bhagavad Gita* is published in more than thirty languages and in more than a thousand individual editions; indeed, this Indian narrative is the second most translated book in the world after the Bible (Minor, 1982; 1986). These types of works often enshrine "foreign" ideas and values, yet the western world's interest in them continues to grow. Thus, critical reflection on how these narratives might function is warranted as an extension to the narrative paradigm. The central concern is how these ancient (and foreign) texts can be accepted by western audiences and how they can consequently affect the audience's values and beliefs.

This paper shall demonstrate one possible way that eastern narrative, specifically ancient Indian didactic texts (such as songs of praise, or "*gitas*"), can revise the current understanding of the narrative paradigm to allow for the introduction of new values and narratives to an audience. By using the examples of the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Devi Gita*, the niche for possibility can be delineated in narratives and their possible effects on a foreign audience. These texts are what I shall label *multivalent narratives*; by enshrining coexisting and conflicting value structures within their narratives, they expose audiences to new values and ideas while not alienating them through extreme novelty. A value structure is a textual edifice, composed of various statements, that judges or pronounces certain actions and beliefs as "good," "desirable," "right," etc. In order to demonstrate and explain these concepts, it is first necessary to discuss the reasons why the narrative paradigm, as defended by Fisher (1987), seemingly precludes a rhetoric of the possible. After this exigence is exposed, proposed solutions to the challenge of possibility shall be discussed, both from within the field of rhetoric and from related disciplines; these solutions, it shall be noted, fail to cope with the mechanisms at work in the Indian didactic texts in question. Following this, some distinctions shall be made between the meaning of multivalent narratives and polysemic texts. The selected Indian narratives shall be analyzed, with implications being drawn as to how they function to expose their potential audiences to novel value structures and ideas. Poulakos (1984) ends his article on the Sophists and Aristotle with a call to explore the relatively unexamined practices of the Sophistic rhetoric of possibility; this paper answers that call, albeit with a focus on the possible within Indian narratives.

Problems with Narrative and Possibility

Fisher (1987; 1989) envisions his project of the narrative paradigm as a reaction against the dominant rational world paradigm that privileges logic over narrative forms of discourse. Discussing the basis for a theoretical rebellion against this paradigm of rationality was MacIntyre (1981), who indicated, "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (p. 201). Taking this foundational link to human narration, Fisher (1984) argues that the dominant paradigm for human interaction, the rational world paradigm, was defunct and did not address all aspects of human communication. Thus, in Fisher's (1987) seminal work, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, he proposes that human communication takes the form of a narrative or story that can be examined and criticized accordingly. Fisher conceptualizes this "narrative rationality" as being roughly equivalent to a neo-Kantian "form of experience"; he argues that all individuals and all cultures view communicative practice as a narrative. These narratives are stories or discourses that potentially contain good reasons to act and/or believe. Thus, narrative rationality addresses how humans are motivated to change, modify, or strengthen their will to action and/or their beliefs toward some aspect of society. Even though Fisher (2000) is moving his research toward the ethical implications of narrative theory, this central idea has continued to inspire a multitude of work with the narrative paradigm, both in regard to theory and to critical practice.

Fisher (1987) summarizes his narrative paradigm by drawing attention to its fundamental presuppositions:

> (1) Humans are essentially storytellers. (2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communication is "good reasons," which vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication. (3) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character. . . . (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings. (p. 64)

Thus, narration is fundamentally linked to the ontology and practices of human society. Fisher continues by defining "narrative beings" and the ways that narratives are judged:

> [they are identified by] their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives. (p. 64)

It is on this foundation that Fisher develops his theory of narrative in all of its mature aspects, and through which problems concerning the rhetoric of the possible intrude.

Fisher's explication of the narrative paradigm and how individuals evaluate narratives seems to preclude new narratives from gaining a strong adherence from the audience. The audience seems to accept or reject narratives based upon their "ringing true" with the audiences' past experiences, values, and beliefs. Indeed, individuals are said to judge a narrative based upon "what *they* perceive as the true and the just" (Fisher, 1987, p. 67, emphasis added). Here the important factor is the self-referential faculty of judgment exercised by the audience; the narrative is judged as being "good" or "bad" based upon what they believe is the case; hence, new possibilities and values may be screened *a priori* from adoption by the audience due to this *de facto* criterion of held beliefs. Fisher, explaining narrative fidelity in greater detail, summarizes this concept, indicating, "the principle of fidelity pertains to the individuated components of stories—whether they represent accurate assertions about the social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief or action" (p. 105). Again the criterion of judgment is seen to reside in the audience's *conception* of social reality; even if one assumes this conception is open to an "objective" evaluation by the audience member, this social reality will still be conditioned by the specific culture and life-world in which he or she finds himself or herself. Possibility in the form of foreign ideas and values is precluded by this aspect of the narrative paradigm; one's social reality will not contain many of the aspects that are important in foreign social realities, thus leading (under Fisher's line of thought) to a rejection of those novel ideas.

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Fisher's (1987) process for judging fidelity and the values of a narrative also exclude novelty and possibility. The fourth step in Fisher's "logic of good reasons" is "the question of *consistency*: Are the values confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive" (p. 109)? This conception of fidelity is endemic to Fisher's theory and serves as a stumbling block for the introduction of novelty through narrative; the criterion is self-referential in regard to what makes a story "good." The theory indicates that one examines his or her own life (or the lives of others they are familiar with) to see if the story is acceptable; this is rendered problematic by such texts as the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Devi Gita*, which proffer extremely unfamiliar ideas and values to the western audience. If we take Fisher on his word, texts such as these would be largely rejected and would remain in obscurity in the western world. Yet the massive rate of translation and influence of many eastern texts (Sharpe, 1985) leads one to question the fidelity of Fisher's explanation of narrative evaluation.

Fisher (1987), of course, attempts to deny the exclusion of novel narratives from his theory, but with rather lackluster results. He states, "Nor does the theory behind the narrative paradigm deny the existence and desirability of genius in individuals or the capacity of 'people' to formulate and adopt new stories that better account for their lives or the mystery of life itself" (p. 67). Fisher, however, discontinues this line of thought and carries on with his attack on the "traditional" conception of rationality without offering any reasons why this paradigm allows for novelty and possibility. Indeed, on the last page of his book is found the following statement

> we *identify* with an account (and its author) or we treat it as mistaken. We identify with stories or accounts when we find that they offer "good reasons" for being accepted. . . . Reasons are good when they are perceived as (1) true to and consistent with what we think we know and what we value, (2) appropriate to whatever decision is pending, (3) promising in effects for ourselves and others, and (4) consistent with what we believe is an ideal basis for conduct. (p. 194)

While Fisher states that possibility is not precluded by the narrative paradigm, his own culminating thoughts seem to locate the evaluation of narratives in the audience's own lifeworld of values, perceived knowledge, and assumed ideals. Kirkwood (1992) espouses this same concern about the narrative paradigm, stating, "These standards for good stories appear to leave little room for rhetors to suggest unfamiliar ideals which exceed people's beliefs and previous experience" (p. 30). Fisher indicates that narratives that challenge a person's self-conception is surely doomed to failure—"If a story denies a person's self-conception, it does not matter what it says about the world" (p. 75). Hence, Kirkwood (1992) concludes, "it is also troubling, for it implies that 'good stories' cannot and perhaps should not exceed people's values and beliefs, whether or not these are admirable or accurate" (p. 30). Fisher's theory is admirable in that it has spawned much heuristically valuable research, but this paper attempts to confront the challenge of how to introduce possibility into the narrative paradigm. As Bennett and Edelman (1985) argue,

> If stories can be constructed to wall off the senses to the dilemmas and contradictions of social life, perhaps they also can be presented in ways that open up the mind to creative possibilities developed in ways that provoke intellectual struggle, the resolution of contradiction, and the creation of a more workable human order. (pp. 161-162)

Proposed explanations of how narratives operate to introduce possibility to an audience will now be examined.

Proposed Solutions

Various scholars have proposed methods through which narratives and discourse can stimulate new ideas and values within audiences. Each of these solutions will be discussed and then shown to be insufficient to explain how eastern narratives, specifically the Indian didactic texts (the "*gitas*"), introduce novelty to a foreign audience. Explanations from the fields of rhetoric, mythology, critical studies, and philosophy shall be examined. Throughout this discussion, various aspects of this genre of ancient Indian narratives shall be highlighted in order

to display the inability of modern narrative theory to deal adequately with them in regard to possibility.

A look at the rhetoric of the ancient Greeks gives some direction to this examination. A discussion of the rhetoric of the possible and the rhetoric of the actual is offered by Poulakos (1984) in relation to the Sophists and Aristotle. Whereas Aristotle privileges the actual world of "facts," the Sophists' rhetoric of possibility "focuses on man's freedom to choose and capacity to become his possibilities; as such, it seeks to make him aware of his possibilities and to offer him new ones . . . it opens new horizons and advocates their pursuits, thus giving man the chance to venture finding what he lacks" (p. 224). Poulakos, however, concludes his mainly theoretical piece with a plea for further research concerning the Sophists and Aristotle; ancient eastern rhetoric is excluded from both his discussions of theory and practice. Without specific textual devices and methods through which narratives can affect a rhetoric of possibility, Poulakos article lacks practical application (as it stands) to ancient eastern didactic tracts such as the *gitas* which this paper will consider. Gerson (1999) points out that Plato's thought was open to interpretation by his followers largely because "the literary structure of the dialogues, each with its own theme, does not provide an obvious basis for systematization" (p. 102). However, the *gitas*, while literary in some of their dialogic aspects, are relatively free standing and have been conveyed to the western world as separate pieces; unlike Plato's works, the characters and plots are separate and distinct. Thus, another account is needed to explain how these *gitas* can introduce novelty into the interpretations of western audiences.

Doniger (1998) explains how myths can be mutlivocal in relation to the act of retelling. She indicates, "a myth is a much-retold narrative that is transparent to a variety of constructions of meaning, a neutral structure that allows paradoxical meanings to be held in a charged tension" (p. 80). Thus, a myth can be told and retold from many different points of view. It is this transparency of meaning that "allows a myth, more than other forms of narrative, to be shared by a group (who, as individuals, have various points of view) and to survive through time (through different generations with different points of view)" (p. 80). This line of theory seems quite useful in regard to the *gitas* and ancient Indian rhetoric in general; much of it is mythic in scope, adaptable to different generations and cognitively available for adoption by portions of the western audience. Doniger's argument, however, fails to explain the multivalence of the *gitas* in question. She suggests that each telling if myth "may have within itself, simultaneously, several points of view, several voices" (p. 84). Examples of this are provided from Homer, in which certain characters voice the alternate readings to the dominant interpretation. This, however, will not lead one far in relation to the *gitas* in this study, as they are didactic texts with the dominant character being the God (or Goddess) delivering a long speech by him or herself. Other voices are often absent from these pieces, yet multiple values are present and possibility can be grasped by the audience.

The track that Doniger is following is that of Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia. Explicating the concept of heteroglossia, HopKins (1989) points out, "Heteroglossia refers to the condition not of co-existing languages but co-existing dialects" (p. 201). These dialects include, according to Bakhtin, "professional jargon, ceremonial speech, religious or Biblical speech, as well as 'languages of generations and age groups'" (HopKins, 1989, p. 201). These dialects form the conditions from which meaning arises through linguistic interaction. While this may explain some mutlivocality in mythic and fictional texts that involve dynamic characters and equal discourse, this concept fails to explain how the *gitas* of ancient India, with their limited characterization and relatively non-dynamic monologic fashion, can still stimulate new lines of audience thought and adherence concerning "foreign" values, ideas, and thoughts. Thus, this study must look beyond the presence of many voices within these ancient Indian texts in order to discern how they operate in a multivalent fashion.

Kirkwood (1992) has challenged the narrative paradigm as being closed to a rhetoric of possibility, and has advanced solutions to this exigency. He proposed an explanation of how texts expand the possibilities open to audience reaction and action; he started with the assumption

that states of mind can influence and define morally virtuous actions (and the perceptions thereof). He argues, "exercising certain states of mind not only enables virtue; it helps define it" (p. 53). Stories that reveal the state of mind of characters transcending the "possible world" are argued to be more effective at stimulating new lines of audience thought. Kirkwood indicates,

> Because nonrevealing accounts do not make clear the states of mind which enable performances, audiences necessarily focus on the particulars of these performances, details that depend heavily on what Bruner calls the "possible world" of the story. Such performances exemplify specific possibilities of conduct for auditors only when this world closely resembles the world auditors inhabit. (p. 37)

Thus, if the world of the narrative is removed from the world of the audience and no realistic states of mind are portrayed, the audience will experience difficulty in generalizing the possibility for new action and valuation to their lives. Kirkwood explicates the converse case, the revealing account:

> By comparison, because revealing accounts disclose states of mind that exceed the "possible worlds" in which they are evoked, even plainly invented performances can disclose compelling possibilities of awareness. . . . Thus the ability of revealing accounts to disclose possibilities does not hinge on their fidelity. (p. 37)

Kirkwood's ultimate suggestion for revealing possibilities is for "rhetors . . . to make them [narrative actions] revealing by reducing their ambiguity" (p. 40). This, however, is not the optimum explanatory tool for the ancient Indian *gitas*; while they contain a minimal amount of characters, the discourse is dominated by the God or Goddess talking about moral action, true epistemological stances, and attitudinal change. A more heuristic explanation must be proposed since these narratives deal mainly with discourse *about* states of mind and action (i.e., of the enlightened person), not discourse involving states of mind *inducing* certain actions. Little description is given demonstrating how a character is feeling and thinking and how this relates to narrative rewards or effects. Again, theory explaining these Indian narratives has yet to surface among recent explanations of the rhetoric of possibility.

Scholars from philosophy have contributed some observations concerning the multivalence of ancient Indian texts, albeit in an unsustained manner. For instance, Mohanty (1997) points out that the very nature of Indian philosophical/religious discourse was often intentionally open to interpretation; speaking about the *sutras* (aphorisms), he indicates,

> It is noteworthy that a new style or genre of philosophical systematization began, one that is very uniquely Indian. This is the genre of the *sutras* or aphorisms. Out of the disorganized motley of ideas already prevalent, a systematizing genius "formed" a system by composing neatly, systematically and scientifically, a number of aphorisms, brief formulae as they were, easy to memorize and keep one's grip on, however too cryptic to make clear sense without the aid of explanatory expositions that soon were bound to follow. (p. 28)

Mohanty argues that these expositions on the cryptic *sutras* provided the audience with multiple interpretations that were relatively in sync with the original text (albeit a truncated text). These philosophers "exploited the ambiguity of the aphorisms in order to interpret them in new ways and to let the texts 'show' new meaning and interpretive possibilities" (p. 28). While this is an innovative take on the oral tradition of the ancient *sutras* of India, the more narrative forms of the *gitas* have resisted such blatant interpretation, containing both a sustained story and dialogic order. Instead of separate aphorisms, the God or Goddess in a *gita* are involved in a long instructional speech to devotees; thus, interpretation within the original text is kept to a minimum. A more specific and developed solution is needed to the problem of how the *gitas*, as representative of ancient Indian rhetoric, enshrine multivalence in order to facilitate the introduction of novel ideas to the audience. Toward this end, the discussion now turns to the distinction between the polysemy literature and the emerging concept of multivalence.

Multivalence and Polysemy

Previous work on polysemic texts has been productive in discovering that modern texts, particularly those conveyed through television, can hold various meanings simultaneously (Fiske, 1986a; 1987; 1991; Jensen, 1991; Rowland & Strain, 1994). Many of these studies also note that simple domination of subgroups can be avoided through alternative readings (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980; Radway, 1986). Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci (1991), in an article addressing postmodern architecture, point out the influence of postmodern theory on issues of meaning; they argue, "The goal [in postmodern studies] is not to locate *the* message but the multiple, frequently conflicting, messages. To attempt a unified, centered reading, thus, is to miss the point" (p. 268). Much of the recent research into issues of interpretation of texts by an audience allow for multiple meanings. While some interesting theoretical debates have played out concerning the locus of critical projects concerning polysemic interpretation (Cloud, 1992; 1996; 1997;Condit, 1994; 1996; 1997), this study forgoes that discussion to focus on the interplay of study between Fiske and Condit due to its relevance to multivalence.

Much scholarly discussion and study has taken place concerning polysemic texts. An important researcher in this field, Fiske (1986b), operationally defines polysemic texts as those that "contain within them unresolved contradictions that the viewer can exploit in order to find within them structural similarities to his or her own social relations and identity" (p. 392). He continues this line of argument in relation to television programming. It seems that modern television shows must allow for various groups to be appeased by the act of watching a show; thus, multiple readings are offered through characters, ambiguous dialogue, jokes, etc. to offer a variety of readings to an audience member. Fiske differs from such scholars as Kellner (1982), who argues that different television texts contradict and allow for multiple interpretations; Fiske finds that each text on television holds multiple and contradictory interpretations for audience involvement. Fiske extends his analysis of these various interpretative uses of the text in light of the dominant interests and subordinate interests of powerful or disenfranchised groups. Fiske's analysis of polysemic texts fails to adequately address the demands of the ancient Indian narratives of the *gitas* in question in three dimensions. First, his analysis is primarily oriented toward class conflicts and group rivalry, whereas this study focuses on the interaction between an ancient, foreign narrative and its modern audience. Second, Fiske's analysis finds that different viewers take different, albeit preferred views away from the polysemic text. This analysis desires theoretical and practical knowledge on how an audience can take away new attitudes and values from a remote narrative, not simply find what they want in the text and stop the task of interpretation there. Indeed, as will be explored in the remainder of this study, audiences often *cannot* stop at such a point of familiarity. Finally, his conception of polysemy misses its true mark; instead of dealing with different ideational meanings, the focus of this study (and probably of Fiske's project) addresses the evaluation of textual messages and the value formations that one interprets in them.

It is this problem in Fiske's notion of polysemy that Condit (1989) stresses. In her empirical study of the responses of two individuals to a particular episode of *Cagney & Lacey*, she finds that the individuals *understood* the text under observation and its denotation, but that the *evaluation* of this text varied. Contrary to Fiske, Condit limits the use of "polysemy" with her employment of "polyvalence." Polyvalence, according Condit, "occurs when audience members share understandings of the denotations of a text but disagree about the valuation of those denotations to such a degree that they produce noticeably different interpretations" (p. 106). Thus, both of her subjects understood what was happening in the episode, but they attached differing evaluations to it. She indicates, "The emphasis on the polysemious quality of texts thus may be overdrawn. The claim perhaps needs to be scaled back to indicate that responses and interpretations are generally polyvalent, and texts themselves are occasionally or partially polysemic" (p. 107). Viewers are forced into a position that challenges their faculties of evaluation; Condit argues, "It is not that texts routinely feature unstable denotation but that instability of connotation requires viewers to judge texts from their own value systems" (p. 107).

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This analysis, however, still leaves the idea of learning from foreign value structures within texts unexplored. Condit seems to continue with Fiske's pattern of different viewers evaluating/understanding different aspects of the text in line with their held values—a dilemma very similar to that entails by Fisher's conception of fidelity.

With this conflict within the polysemy/polyvalence literature reviewed, this paper now advances some putative distinctions between three potential functions of texts. Texts can be *polysemic*, which indicates that differing auditors find different meanings in the text. This is amply illustrated by Fiske's (1986b) analysis; differing auditors receive different meanings and understandings of what is occurring within the text. A text is *polyvalent* when differing auditors evaluate the same understood text in different ways. Condit's (1989) work demonstrates this with two college students; due to their differing value systems, each evaluates the television episode radically different (to one it is desirable, to the other, a gross attack on his values). This study attempts to delineate a third function of a text, especially in intercultural situations. The proposed notion of a *multivalent* text highlights that narratives (especially from ancient eastern traditions) can use seemingly contradictory value structures and statements to entice the auditor. The auditor must then understand and reconstruct how these values, some of which may be familiar and desirable, can coexist without cognitive dissonance or contradiction. The task becomes finding how these disparate value statements can be reconciled in one's understanding of the text, not simply finding what one desires in the text (polysemy) or evaluating the text based upon one's held values (polyvalence).

In order to explore this conception of *multivalence*, two ancient Indian didactic texts will now be analyzed. An important focus of Fisher's (1987) work concerns values and "good reasons"; consequently, this paper will reconstruct the disparate value structures in these eastern narratives to demonstrate how audiences are forced to reconcile differing and alien values. Scholars such as Cross (1994), Klostermaier (1998), and Koller (1985) point out that eastern philosophies differ from western views on two important continuums of value and normativity; the separation/non-separation of "God" (i.e., Self) from the world and the individual, and persuasion toward action/inaction on the part of the individual. While the first dimension may seem more epistemological that normative, in ancient eastern texts the possession of such knowledge is a major step toward enlightenment; thus, these types of revelations are couched in terms of one's walking the path toward salvation. The epistemological therefore becomes normative in these texts through the desirable belief/disbelief in certain concepts. The narratives of these two ancient *gitas* shall be examined for contradictory value structures in regard to these two continuums, facilitating analysis of the concept of *multivalence* in the final section of this study.

Analysis of Ancient Indian Narratives

The *Avadhoota Gita*

The *Avadhoota Gita* is an ancient Vedantin religious/philosophical work that recounts a conversation (albeit extremely one-sided) between the guru (and instantiated form of God), Dattatreya, and his disciple, Kartika. The guru discusses topics from the nature of reality, the form of the soul, and the path of action, all with a focus on adopting the correct attitudes and dispositions to enable salvation. Rigopoulos (1998) indicates that the conceptual evolution of Dattatreya as a deity has touched on most major strands of Hinduism as a religion; thus, western attention is beginning to be drawn to works such as the *Avadhoota Gita* as important tools in understanding the religions of India. The translation to be used for this analysis is by Shree Purohit Swami (1988). The work is divided into chapters and verses, and will be cited accordingly in parenthesis (i.e. 1:12). Both of the continuums shall be dealt with in a brief, yet representative fashion.

In regard to the separation of God from the world, the *Avadhoota Gita* contains a definite value structure that leads the reader to acknowledge that God is separate from the world. Many statements enshrine an assumed separation between God (Dattatreya) and his disciples; for instance, he states, "I feel no pleasure, no displeasure. I wonder how they happen to others"

(1:7). At another point, Dattatreya reports, "I am that ultimate good, that never comes or goes, that is beyond good and evil, beyond distress and doubt" (2:5). These two phrases imply a separation between the ordinary world of people, good, evil, etc., and the supreme reality of God. Indeed, Dattatreya's instructions to his disciple indicate that God is separate, both epistemologically and ontologically; he states, "The devotee . . . knows God is merciful, becomes fearless, sings His praise in various ways" (2:22), and later, "he is a saint . . . who surrenders himself unto Me" (8:2). The audience is lead by these statements to the value structure that it is right and efficacious for salvation to believe that God is separate from this world, thus creating a goal (subordination to a master) to which one aspires. When this value structure is adopted, the separation from God and individual ceases; Dattatreya indicates, "when mind is cleansed, personality dissolves into the universal good beyond recognition" (1:31). The deity (Self) lives separate from the individual; he states, "It [Self/truth] lives beyond the tutor, beyond the pupil" (5:28). Thus, this text contains textual impetus for the audience to believe that God is separate from the world and the individual person. The deity is separate from the individual, and the path to salvation (mind being cleansed) is phrased in such a way (in this value structure) to complement that existential separation.

This text, however, does not just include the value structure that pushes for belief that God is separate; indeed, many statements made by Dattatreya lead the auditor to believe that God is always immanent in reality, the world, etc. He argues for the belief of God as resident in all things, stating, "I am that formless Self who subsists in everything" (1:5). Later, Dattatreya points out that the disciple is to believe that "I alone occupy everything, living without preference, living beyond the heavens" (1:10). The modern auditor will see herein a textual invitation to believe that the correct belief is that God is not separate from reality; indeed, God is the substratum of all reality. Discussing the subservience of the disciple, Dattatreya indicates its futility; he states, "Dear friend, how can I bow to my own Self, living in myself, for I am that pure and everlasting good, without complexion, without change, without cause and effect" (3:2). Thus, the deity is described as not a master, but as already subsiding within all things. Dattatreya argues against the separate of follower and deity, indicating, "There is no Shepard, no flock" (6:23). Thus, the auditor is asked to believe that God is not separate from the world within this value structure.

In regard to the dimension of textual pushes for action or inaction, the *Avadhoota Gita* contains a value structure that requests the audience to believe that the individual is warranted in acting to attain salvation. Thus, portions of this text contain the value structure of personal empowerment through individual action. For instance, Dattatreya says, "the Awadhoota [the enlightened person] lives happily alone, in a deserted cottage, or else without garment, without pride, moves at random; obtains everything in himself only" (1:73). Actions such as mediation are quite conducive to attaining enlightenment; "When by constant practice the pupil can meditate without is help, he loses himself along with the symbol into the Self; becomes free from good and evil" (2:16). The enlightened individual can, through meditation and other such action, attain the desired salvation; Dattatreya indicates, "the unique condition attained by the Yogi, engaged in meditation or work, without an eye on reward, is beyond description" (1:27). The actions of the enlightened person do matter, and the pro-action value structure in this text attempts to shape attitudes and behaviors of the auditors. Speaking on types of worship, Dattatreya argues, "Form or no form, it is all worship of the good" (4:1). Thus, the auditor is invited by this value structure to take care in choosing his or her actions, as they impact future salvation.

This text, however, also contains a contradictory value structure urging the audience to not be concerned about action, as it is ineffective in gaining salvation, etc. Dattatreya strikes against the concept of meditation he praises elsewhere, stating, "Remember, you alone in-dwell all things always. When you say you meditate, you meditate on something other than yourself; but then, you divide the indivisible. Can you" (1:12)? At another point, he indicates the futility of meditation, stating, "When everything is one, freedom incarnate, where is the charm of

meditation on Self, where is the charm of meditation on non-Self, where is the charm of meditation when there is a dispute between being and non-being" (1:23)? Meditation, regardless of its object, seems to hold little value for the enlightened one, according to this anti-action value structure. Dattatreya even goes so far as to erase personal efficacy, the very antithesis of pro-action value structures; he argues, "Within you there is no one to meditate, no Samadhi [enlightenment, release] yet to be attained. There is no inner meditation, no outer meditation, no object of meditation, no joy of meditation" (3:41). Indeed, there are no states of enlightenment that free oneself from desire, a tradition goal of asceticism and mediation; Dattatreya indicates, "We have no desire, none whatever, from righteousness to liberation. How can the wise think of possession and renunciation" (7:14)? Devotion to the deity becomes a useless action, according to Dattatreya, since "There is no shepherd, no flock; the idea of service is scattered to the winds" (6:23). The auditor is invited to believe that actions, be it meditative, religious, or service-oriented, are useless in attaining any type of salvation. This point rests in contradistinction to the previous structure noted, which indicated particular actions and maxims that the individual can utilize to achieve enlightenment and salvation. The *Avadhoota Gita* contains strong indications of differing value structures, both in regard to the first dimension of the separation/non-separation of God (Self) from the world (including the individual), and in regard to action being advised or useless in regard to salvation of the individual.

The *Devi Gita*

The *Devi Gita* is an ancient Indian text dating from around 1300AD. It is an important work in many circles of Hinduism because of its mimicry of the *Bhagavad Gita* in content and form, and due its exaltation of the Devi, or Goddess, an important instantiation of divine power (Coburn, 1996; Hawley, 1986; Kinsley, 1988). This narrative recounts a discussion between a saddened King Janamejaya and his sage, Vyasa. Vyasa, in an attempt to lighten the King's sadness, tells the story of how the gods beseeched the Devi to allow herself to be born into human form in the family of the god Himalaya, so that the evil demon, Taraka, could finally be defeated. The majority of this text is concerned with the Devi lecturing Himalaya on the nature of the world, the goddess, and religious activity. The translation to be used for this analysis is by C. Mackenzie Brown (1998). The work, in typical *gita* fashion, is divided into chapters and verses, and will be cited accordingly in parenthesis (i.e. 1:15). Both of the continuums present within the narrative shall be dealt with in a brief, yet representative fashion in the following analysis.

One value structure in this text proposes to the auditor that the Goddess (Devi), is essentially separate from individual devotees and the world in general. The "servant-master" relationship is nurtured by Devi making such statements as, "I rescue my devotees from the troubled ocean of samsara [the cycle of death and rebirth]" (1:56) and that these secret teachings of the Goddess should only be available to "one who is supremely devoted to God [Devi]" (6:22). These lines are posing the Goddess figure as separate and distinct from her devotees and the world; thus, the auditors of this text are propelled toward accepting this value structure as true and conducive to the right attitude on life and salvation. Indeed, Devi comments upon this servitude of the devotee, indicating that this is a person who lives while "cherishing the notion of servant and master and thus not even aspiring for liberation" (7:14). The divide between deity and devotee seems to be quite expansive; the Devi's own advice espouses the value structure of a beneficial and real divide between Goddess and the world (humans included). The normative weight of these beliefs is summarized when Devi remarks, "Those who are fully focused on me, their hearts bound to me, are deemed the best of devotees. I promise to rescue them quickly from this worldly existence" (9:12-13). This value structure definitely holds rhetorical incentives for an auditor to accept Devi as the separate master.

A contrary value structure, however, is present in regard to the Goddess being essentially one with the world and with humans. To indicate her immanence within all things, Devi states, "In me this whole world is woven in all directions" (3:12), and "whatever thing, anywhere, you see or hear, that entire thing I pervade, ever abiding inside it and outside" (3:16). Devi occupies all aspects of this world; the value structure of master-servant seems to be contradicted by this

value structure of deity immanence. If doubt is left concerning her place within humans, she states, "I am not separate from anyone, nor is anyone separate from me" (6:16). This declaration even includes "non-ideal" aspects of human nature and behavior; she indicates, "I am the evil doer and the wicked deed; I am the righteous person and the virtuous deed" (3:15). Devi lies at the core of human and inhuman existence; she advises her audience of gods (and the human auditor to this text) to recognize "My omnipresent essence manifested in all being everywhere at all times" (7:17). The normative import of this belief is quite clear; it allows one to adopt the correct and virtuous attitude of one "who thinks of beings as embodiments of myself [Devi], loving other selves as one's own Self [Brahman, Devi]" (7:16). The emergent value structure of Devi as immanent within the world and humanity is quite evident; while it contradicts the previous value structure of master-servant relations, it is developed and dogmatically decreed by the Goddess in this text.

Another value structure that exists in the *Devi Gita* is that of action being efficacious in regard to salvation or liberation. Concerned with her devotee's liberation, Devi advises them to "perform them [religious actions] with diligence until tranquility, restraint, patience, dispassion, and goodness arise" (4:15-16). Actions do seem to have a use to reach these higher states of virtue and disinterest in worldly desires. Devi also states, "One should also, through intense meditation, realize that I am in essence the Self" (4:40). Indeed, the results of meditation and self-disciplining actions are worth gaining; she indicates, "One should strive constantly until one attains the fruits of the highest level [from yoga]" (5:21). Effective work in regard to meditation requires constant action; she states, "such spiritual practice performed daily, All mantras previously uttered incorrectly will become effective, without fail" (5:52). Action does seem to hold an important devotional and pragmatic purpose; Devi points out, "By meditating on her [the Goddess] lotus feet, one becomes freed from bondage. Whoever, arising at dawn, should recite these names of the Goddess, burns to ashes all sins instantly . . . [and] all one's ancestors will be freed and go to the highest state" (8:34-36). Other religious actions are also enjoined; Devi states, "there are other rites . . . Whoever performs these rites unselfishly, just to please me, attains union with me" (8:43-44). Action is advocated of the auditor, according to this value structure, because of its effectiveness in pleasing the Goddess and in procuring spiritual advancements and boons to the practicing individual.

In direct conflict with this value structure, however, is one that stipulates that action is relatively useless in gaining liberation. Discussing the futility of action, Devi states, "Action, born of ignorance, is incompetent to destroy ignorance, since the two are not opposed" (4:9). The ignorant drives toward sating one's constant and varied desires through actions is thus judged to be useless in regard to salvation. In the previous value structure, Devi indicated that the fruits of religious action (meditation included) are great; within this value structure, however, Devi commands her devotees to "renounc[e] worldly attachments" and to be "self-restrained" (4:17). It seems that the craving for results due to meditation and mantra/name recitation are equally condemned as attachments in this value structure as they facilitate and feed off of desire for ego-based results. Instead of action accruing salvation for the individual, "liberation arises from knowledge and from nothing else" (7:31). The attainment of this knowledge is said to take "many births...not in one" (7:38). Thus, action within one lifetime is said not to yield the results the previous value structure promised. As opposed to pleasing the Goddess with actions, this value structure advises the auditor that "knowledge dwells in every being" (7:44) and that recollection is a matter of mental concentration, not religious action.

Implications for the Narrative Paradigm

This section turns to the task of demonstrating how these multivalent narratives function and how they can be reconciled with Fisher's narrative paradigm. The two *gitas* analyzed previously illustrate that texts can enshrine multiple value structures. This is an important part of the functioning of these texts, in that these structures literally force the audience to reconstruct a meaning to the text and their reaction to it. These characteristics enable new values to be

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combined with previously held values, or to possibly replace the status quo values of an auditor partaking in a multivalent text.

The multiple value structures within a multivalent narrative place the audience in an active role that requires some type of cognitive reconstruction of what the text is actually saying. For instance, when confronted with a narrative such as the *Avadhoota Gita*, a western auditor is faced with two initial choices; to ignore the text as nonsense or to try to give meaning to all its blatant contradictions and purposive clouding of issues. Using this text as an example, an auditor must reconstruct what it means if they wish to understand it (i.e., if they decide it is not nonsense); there are simply too many surface contradictions in Dattatreya's statements to allow for a straightforward reading of it. Instead, the reader must sift through what the deity is saying about the world and action, and see if an emergent message can be detected (for instance, if one of the contradictory value structures is ultimately rejected by the narrative). If no emergent message can be found, the listener then must decide if a suitable permutation of these contradictions can be forged; for instance, could the reader see the text as arguing the deity as being *both* separate and united with the world and the individual? If this position is amiable to the western auditor, the text has had some major effects in regard to theological limits of western fidelity.

In regard to the *Devi Gita*, the western auditor may find it cognitively sound to perceive the *Devi* as both a goddess and as the underlying stratum to all reality. The auditor may also privilege one structure over the other in the creation of a combination; for instance, a western auditor so oriented toward a monotheistic religion may find the *Devi* as a godhead (albeit one that they may reject in favor of the Judeo-Christian one) and see her inflection in the created world as a property of her omnipotence (i.e., the phrases in the *gita* that discuss the goddess's maya or power as creating the world we experience). Notice that the narrative is not being taken as a whole, since there are many statements that strictly place the *Devi* in all of creation through immanence, not through her creative powers; instead, the auditor must reconcile these value structures that are forced upon him or her through the text. It is also beneficial to note that it is extremely hard, assuming one is relatively cognitively advanced, to simply ignore a value structure and choose the one that is identified with the most. Instead, the auditor must address the equally strong value structures that contradict the one that they find most appealing; if the text is not ignored, the result of this confrontation is more likely to be a permutation of the two value structures.

These reconstructions are assisted by what can be labeled "transcendental dissolutions" within these texts. These transcendental dissolutions attempt to transcend contradictions, and hence, dissolve or ignore them. Oliver (1971), in his groundbreaking study of eastern rhetoric, argues that in Indian rhetoric, "Opposites are coordinates. Contradictions are illusory" (p. 15). While these contradictions may be illusory, their textual traces are not; thus the auditor is still confronted with phrases in favor of both sides of a contradiction (two value structures) and transcendental dissolutions scattered throughout the text; from this hodge-podge of textual vectors, the auditor must figure out which line of reconciliation is to be privileged. For example, the conflicting value structures concerning the deity's nature in the *Avadhoota Gita* as being separate from or unified with the world have already been noted; what the text adds to this fray are transcendental dissolutions such as "How can I say everything is uniform or multiform; how can I say everything is everlasting or transitory?" (3:5) and "It [Self, God] is neither the subject that enjoys before it creates, nor the object that is enjoyed before it exhausts" (3:18). The *Devi Gita* offers transcendental dissolutions that further complicate the auditor's task of finding meaning in the text; in regard to her true Self, the Devi states, "It is beyond reason, indescribable, incomparable" (2:3). These examples from both *gitas* point out the addition of a "higher" level from which the auditor can select material with which to reconstruct the narrative meaning. The "lower" levels involve the textually significant arguments and assertions in favor of one value structure or its opposite; the higher levels involve statements that see those contradictions as not a true description of the values and issues. However, these transcendental dissolutions still leave

room for the audience to draw from the lower levels in the task of relating all that has been said to its opposites (i.e., contradictory value structures) and to the dissolutions that are offered. One must note that the previously mentioned dissolutions occurred in the *first* few chapters of the works; arguments in favor of the contested value structures are continuously presented through the end of the works. These two levels are textually separate and are readily available for use in auditor reconstruction.

Thus, novel material and values can find their way into an auditor from a remote culture through that auditor's activities in trying to understand these two levels of the text; simply put, he or she may have to identify, confront, and combine foreign (new) values with some more familiar ones within the text in order to understand what the narrative is arguing. The groundwork is laid for narratives to introduce the novel to audiences that often judge solely by the familiar. As opposed to Fiske's (1986b) ideas on polysemy, a multivalent narrative resists simple searches for what the auditor likes and finds appealing; instead, these aspects, if they exist at all, must be combined with equally strong and interlaced structures that are extremely foreign and novel (i.e., the idea of God as immanent in all things).

Some comments shall be made concerning the compatibility of the previous analysis with some of the theory supporting the narrative paradigm. In regard to the normative/epistemological collapses that these eastern texts often make, statements from Fisher (1987) can be seen as espousing this eastern tendency; for instance, he writes, "whatever is taken as a basis for adopting a rhetorical message is inextricably bound to a value—to a conception of the good" (p. 107). Thus, the statements within these *gitas* that exert force on the audience to believe that reality is a certain way are normative in two regards; first, they compel an auditor to believe one view over another, and second, they are tied to normative views of ideal life, society, etc. The auditor's beliefs are drawn into question by the multivalent narrative and may emerge modified by foreign ideas and values. Indeed, Fisher finds that the beliefs within narratives can form the basis for action; he states, "*all good stories function in two ways: to justify (or mystify) decisions or actions already made or performed and to determine future decisions or actions*" (p. 187). The audience is forced to reconstruct what these multivalent narratives are saying and meaning, and to consider how this relates to their past and future decisions and actions. The interesting part of texts such as the *Devi Gita* and the *Avadhoota Gita* is that neither leads to one simple argument or position; instead, the value structures are strewn throughout all the chapters, and the transcendental dissolutions, a seemingly easy way out for the audience, are often presented *early* in the work prior to extended development of the lower level value structures.

This study postulates that those issues that Fisher finds as problematic with narrative, i.e. incoherence and contradiction, are actually potential entry points for novel ideas and values into the auditor's belief system. For instance, Fisher (1987) finds that

> Whether a story is believable depends on the reliability of characters. . . . Determination of one's character is made by interpretations of the person's decisions and actions that reflect values . . . character may be considered an organized set of actional tendencies. If these actional tendencies contradict one another, change significantly, or alter in "strange" ways, the result is a questioning of character. (p. 47)

This diagnosis, however, seems insensitive to Indian rhetorical tactics. As Deutsch (1968) and Agrawal (1992) indicate, Indian philosophical texts often utilize contradiction and a "progressive" approach to reveal ideas to an audience. In regard to this study, Fisher's characterization is not ideal for the *gitas* analyzed since they use the deity to espouse contradictory value structures (indeed, two levels of claims, the higher and the lower levels) while building a recognizable narrative. These twists of character and contradictory actional tendencies confuse most western auditors and forces them to make some sense out of this confusion if they are to judge the text as fitting with their senses of narrative *probability* and *fidelity*.

These hallmark concepts of the narrative paradigm must be altered in light of the concept of multivalent narratives. This study has demonstrated that novel values can infiltrate an auditor's belief system through these types of narratives. Instead of simply considering if the

narrative "rings true" with what he or she believes, auditors must first reconstruct the narrative and its meaning. This entails that they are not simply testing all values against already held values and beliefs. Fisher describes the quality of narrative probability or coherence as

> refer[ing] to formal features of a story conceived as a discrete sequence of thoughts and/or action in life or literature (any written or recorded form of discourse); that is, it concerns whether a story coheres or "hangs together," *whether or not a story is free of contradictions.* (p. 88, emphasis added)

To a western audience sympathetic to western texts, this emphasis on consistency may be allowed; in regard to eastern texts and audiences (including western ones) sympathetic to these tactics, contradiction does not automatically equate to an incoherent story that fails to "hang together." Instead of the emphasis upon the presence of contradictions, the definition of narrative probability should be altered, referring to *the formal features of a discourse that hold a formal sequence of events (including dialogic events) that allow the auditor to reconstruct a coherent meaning.* This reworking of this concept allows such narratives as the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Devi Gita* to be considered as possibly acceptable narratives in spite of their contradictions. The true criterion is whether anything can come from these contradictions; if the audience can reconstruct a coherent meaning from this seemingly convoluted text, then it is available to be judged.

The evaluative concept of narrative fidelity can be modified based upon this discussion of multivalent narratives. Fidelity is defined by Fisher (1987) as "concern[ing] the 'truth qualities' of a story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values" (p. 88). As previously discussed, the logic of good reasons and fidelity in general center upon the identification with what one already holds to be true or right. These beliefs and values can be challenged, however, by texts such as the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Devi Gita* by demonstrating how foreign or novel values can be (or indeed, must be) combined with one's familiar values. The challenge that this study makes to the narrative paradigm is that it is not mere equivalence of values in the story and in one's mind that leads to acceptance; instead, one can postulate that sometimes it is the auditor that "rings true" to new ideas and values within a foreign narrative. While an auditor may not have considered that the deity lies within them or what this belief means in terms of action, the confrontation of this belief in a foreign text while connected to familiar notions of a separate deity may allow our standards of judgments to grow and change. Thus, narrative fidelity should include *whether or not a story "rings true" with the values that an auditor holds or potentially could hold, given a coherent reconstruction of the narrative in question.* Of course, this begs for future research concerning the limits of audience adoption of novel ideas and values; this study, while sidestepping that issue, does point out that the effectiveness in multivalent narrative lies within the reassuring, yet not staunchly conservative, mixture of new and old value structures.

Eastern narratives such as the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Devi Gita* are quite foreign in regard to western theories, such as the narrative paradigm, and to western lines of thought, involving such issues of the unity of being and gods that are both masters and united entities with all things. These narratives, despite their novelty, captivate many minds and offer the potential to change one's values in light of foreign values in the text. These Indian *gitas* are examples of multivalent narratives that hold contradictory value structures that offer the audience a mix of new and familiar values. These value structures, however, are intertwined in such a way as to force the audience to reconstruct how they interact and what the text "means." This paper has established that previous literature faults the narrative paradigm for disallowing a rhetoric of possibility and that proposed solutions do not adequately address the exigency that eastern texts pose to our understanding of rhetoric and narrative. In light of the discussion between Fiske and Condit, multivalent narratives are seen to be separate from polysemic or polyvalent narratives in that they force the audience to reconstruct a meaning out of the disparate values present, whereas the latter terms denote the audience merely identifying with what they desire in a text. This understanding of multivalence, coupled with an analysis of the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Devi Gita*,

lead one to modify some basic tenets of the narrative paradigm as espoused by Fisher (1987). While this study acknowledges the heuristic work that has resulted from the narrative paradigm, it also notices that this line of theory is inadequate to explain some important characteristics of Indian rhetoric. Instead of being entirely self-referential, this inquiry proposes that the concepts of narrative probability and fidelity be modified to allow for audience reconstructions of textual meaning and audience adoption of new values as a result of the narrative exposure. This will advance not only an understanding of the narrative paradigm, but also the important field of Indian rhetoric.

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